

Wilder Ranch - Cow Barn
1401 Coast Road
Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz County
California

HABS No. CA-2274-B

HABS
CAL.
44-SACRU,
3-B-

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

WILDER RANCH - COW BARN

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CAL,
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Location: 1401 Coast Road, Santa Cruz County, California; two miles north of Santa Cruz on the coast side of State Highway 1.

Present Owner/Occupant: State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Present Use: This building is part of a 22-acre cultural preserve at Wilder Ranch State Park where dairying and ranch life along California's coast is interpreted.

Significance: Wilder Ranch State Park's ranch buildings, while representative of rural vernacular architecture, reflect a century of traditions associated with innovative and progressive dairy ranching in California. Wilder and four succeeding generations of his family were quick to adopt the newly developed cream-separator, and the majority of the machinery was water powered using a Pelton wheel and belt-drive system, including the electrification of the dairy in the 1890s. In the 1930s the emphasis at the ranch shifted from milk to beef stock, as well as thoroughbred horses and artichoke production.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Unknown, though according to D.R. Wilder, the cow barn was standing when his grandfather, D.D. Wilder, and Levi Baldwin acquired the property in 1871.

The barn may be the modified remnant of a sawmill completed by Jose Bolcoff, Eli Moore and John Doak in 1849. Its broad-axed, hand-hewn beams and location over Wilder Creek provide support for this argument.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The history of Wilder Ranch can be traced back to California's Mexican period. Once known as Rancho Refugio, in 1836 the land was granted by the Mexican government to the three Castro sisters: Candida, Jacinta and Maria de Los Angeles Castro. Candida had married Joseph Bolcoff, a naturalized Mexican citizen of Russian-Siberian birth. Bolcoff's name is not mentioned in the original grant, but in 1849-50 he took control of Rancho Refugio. Bolcoff hoped to disenfranchise Jacinta and Maria, in order to clear the claims of Joseph "Jose" Majors, who had married Maria in 1839. Majors had been selling Rancho Refugio property which he did not own since 1848.

Bolcoff sold "undivided interests" in parcels of Refugio to Moses A. Meder (often spelled Meader in public records) from 1850 to 1856. Meder bought and sold parcels, and brought his son-in-law, Thomas B. Hart into the arrangement. Upon Bolcoff's death, under tremendous

legal pressure, his sons sold all their rights to a Charles E. Norton. By that time, perhaps twenty persons, companies, and law firms held claims against Rancho Refugio.

In 1866, Moses A. Meder, et. al, took Norton to court to prove their claims on the lower two-thirds of Rancho Refugio. Norton claimed an undivided interest from the Bolcoff estate. Meder represented Samuel Adams, Albion P. Jordan, Isaac E. Davis, Robert F. Peckham, Adna A. Hecox, Thomas Courtis, Maria O. de Cadiz, Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works Company, Richard F. Ryan, George Pace, Richard W. Linton, George Parsons, Manuel L. Brockelbank, W.W. Broughton, Henry Rice, Joaquin R. Majors, George Caldwell, David Caldwell, Daniel Caldwell, R.E. Merrill, E. Bender, and Henry Ryan. A master counsellor appointed by the court reported that none of the above were bona fide purchasers, but that Meder did legally own a two-thirds interest in his purchase, as well as Jordan and Davis; and that Thomas Courtis did, in good faith, give a quit claim to Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works, but that he did not legally own the full undivided interest that he sold or transferred.

By the late 1860s, the courts were untangling enough of the legal mess of the eastern two-thirds of Rancho Refugio to allow John T. Fairbanks of Sonoma County and Richard H. Hall to begin buying up claims against the property. In 1870, Fairbanks and Hall were able to acquire all of Meder's various claims upon the ranch, plus other leases and liens, including what is now the area of the cultural preserve. Hall then sold his entire interest to Fairbanks. In May 1871, Fairbanks sold his interest to Levi K. Baldwin of Santa Cruz and Deloss D. Wilder of Sonoma County. The two men established (or continued) five dairies on the property. Wilder and Baldwin's purchase encompassed well over 4,000 acres in two distinct parcels.

In 1885, Baldwin and Wilder dissolved their partnership and divided the acreage into "upper" and "lower" ranches. Wilder obtained the "lower" 2,330 acres, including the present state park cultural preserve area, for \$32,000.

The Wilder family owned the property for nearly a century until July 1969, when it was sold to the Moroto Investment Company, Ltd., a subsidiary of Sussman Properties, Ltd., of Toronto, Canada.

The California State Department of Parks and Recreation acquired the cultural preserve area, along with the beaches, coastal benchlands and uplands of Wilder Ranch in 1974 to establish Wilder Ranch State Park.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings of the building have been located.
4. Alterations and additions: Broad-axed and hand-hewn beams on the first floor over the creek indicate the oldest parts of the barn. Additions were made to this section early in the building's life. Sometime between

ca. 1885 (the year the partnership between D.D. Wilder and Levi Baldwin was dissolved) and 1892, the barn was doubled in length to accommodate 206 cows. In the mid-1930s, when dairy farming on the ranch was discontinued, the stalls on the first floor were removed and the area modified for storage. In the 1940s, according to ranch hand Led Engelsman, the ca. 1885-92 barn addition was removed. About the same time, two interior rooms on the west end of the barn were built and one of the two sliding doors on the west facade was replaced with a hinged door. From time to time the foundations were repaired or replaced, especially after the flooding of Wilder Creek.

- B. Historical Context: The barn structure may have originated as a sawmill that was converted into a flour mill in 1854. It is probable that Moses Meder was responsible for the development of the dairy barn during his 1854-70 ownership. He appears to have managed a successful dairy operation, following the lead set by Jose Bolcoff.

For years the cow barn was a central feature of the ranch's dairy operation. Its enlargement by D.D. Wilder indicates the success of dairy production in the Santa Cruz region at the turn of the century.

The cow barn was originally used to house the animals in inclement weather. Milking was actually done outside in the pasture. Later, with the advent of milking machines, cows were kept in the barn while they were milked. With the conversion of the property to cattle ranching, the barn was remodeled for storage of ranch equipment.

Enterprise and ingenuity have marked the dairy operations at Wilder Ranch since its earliest years. All owners adapted quickly to new machinery, such as the cream-separator and the Pelton wheel, and discoveries, such as electricity, that were constantly refining and streamlining the dairy industry.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Unadorned, gable-roofed vernacular farm structure.
2. Condition of the fabric: Fair; the building's massive beams give the illusion of solid structural support, however, the damp coastal climate and insects have caused considerable damage. The east side of the south facade has wood siding and support beams that are decayed.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 36'-4" x 156'-6".
2. Foundations: The post-and-beam construction includes 8" square wood

posts on the east and west ends of the building; concrete posts are used over the creek. 12" square beams run east-west with 2" planking on top.

3. Walls: Vertical whitewashed redwood boards, varying in width from 6" to 20", with 16" the most common. Most battens have been removed.
4. Structural system, framing: The post-and-beam construction is composed of 8" square posts on the exterior and 6" x 8" posts on the interior. Horizontal beams are 8" square. 3" x 8" ceiling joists run east-west.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the first floor of the north facade there is a 54" x 84" single hinged door, as well as two 136" x 90" hinged double doors and a 54" x 89" hinged door. The entire east end of the building's first floor is composed of paired hinged double doors. The south facade has a 54" x 84" hinged double door. On the west facade there are two red painted doors. One is 100" x 80" and the other 52" x 77". On the second floor there is a 58" x 75" hinged door on the east facade and a 54" x 72" hinged door on the west facade.
 - b. Windows: Originally the north and south facades had 22" x 24" sliding windows. A few of the original sliding windows remain on the south facade, yet most have been considerably altered. On the second floor there are eight 58" x 89" openings on the north facade, a 33-1/2" x 31" six-light window on the west facade, and a 36" x 36" window on the east facade.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: A simple gable-ended roof made of corrugated metal covers earlier wood shakes.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: A cornice board is located around the roof's perimeter.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Essentially one large open space. Earlier stall configurations can be seen in the floors where the gutters have been filled in, while earlier manger locations are indicated by the location of vertical structural supports. Two rooms on the west side are believed to have been added after World War II.

- b. Second floor: An open room used for storage of hay and other feed.
- 2. Stairways: A ladder stair on the west side rises to the second floor.
- 3. Flooring: The first floor has concrete on the sides paralleling the north and south walls. This flooring was added in the 1920s or early 1930s (according to ranch hand Led Engelsman). Wood planks in the center are 2" x 12" to 2" x 16" and are 12' in length, running north-south. Wood flooring on the second floor runs north-south and is random width, ranging from 1" x 6" to 1" x 15".
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior has 39" high concrete walls (added in the 1920s) along the north and south sides of the building topped by vertical white-washed boards. The underside of the floor boards and ceiling joists are also white-washed.
- 5. Openings: Doorways and doors: Originally there were four 44" x 48" trap doors on the second floor, spaced equally along the center east-west axis. Only one remains, the other three have been filled in.
- 6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: Wood wire molding with porcelain sockets are located inside the outer north and south walls. The electrical service is located on the interior of the west side next to the sliding door.
 - b. Plumbing: There is 3/4" pipe with spigots along the north and south walls.
 - c. Other: Remnants of cable-driven machinery is located in the rafters above the second floor. In 1896, according to Isabel Raymond, Pelton wheels powered hay and feed cutters and a pumpkin grinder.
- 7. Original furnishings: The original rail, manure and feed buckets are no longer installed, however they are stored on the first floor.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The cow barn is located over Wilder Creek at the far east end of the ranch complex. The building runs east-west on the property. The site of the former creamery is located immediately west of the cow barn.

2. Historic landscape design: Milking corrals were once located south of the cow barn and creamery; a bungalow now sits on that site.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: There are several early photographic views and drawings of the ranch complex contained in the collections of the California Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Interpretive Services in Sacramento, the California State Library, the Santa Cruz Public Library and the University of California at Santa Cruz Library. Among the images are several in the collections of the Department of Parks and Recreation that show the building with and without its various additions. A drawing of the ranch in 1879 is included in W.W. Elliot's book, Santa Cruz County Illustrations.
- C. Bibliography: See HABS No. CA-2274-A, Horse Barn.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was undertaken for the California Department of Parks and Recreation by the Historic American Buildings Survey, under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief HABS/HAER Division, and Kenneth L. Anderson, chief of HABS. The survey team was composed of project supervisor Christian D. Overby (University of Kansas), and architectural technicians Alexandra Kettles (US/ICOMOS-University of Edinburgh), Shelley Milling (Mississippi State University), and Steve Eccher (University of Colorado).